

Take Charge of Your Career:

**5 principles to getting
(and staying) ahead**



Are you feeling stuck in your job?

The working world has changed—and so should your strategies for career growth. To remain prepared for what comes next, you must be the boss of your professional development.

In this eBook, we'll outline five strategies proven to help you get ahead:

- Create (and maintain) a career roadmap
- Adopt a growth mindset
- Solicit—and act on—feedback
- Keep your skills ahead of the competition
- Surround yourself with the right people

Ready to take that next step? Let's go!



Why is it so important to take charge of your own career development?

For one thing, employers want to do more with less. It's common for job descriptions to include skill sets that would have been divided among more than one role a few years ago.

Also, as more companies have learned to manage work-from-home staff during the pandemic, they've potentially expanded their hiring options to include more remote candidates, meaning your pool of competition has expanded geographically as well as experientially.

Whether you are actively seeking a new job, passively keeping an eye open, or working part-time or on a temporary basis with the hopes of transitioning to a full-time position or new field, it pays to be mindful and strategic about developing your career.

But only 39% of employed U.S. adults say their current employer is helping them improve their existing skills or gain new skills to do their job better, according to the latest American Staffing Association Workforce Monitor® online survey conducted by The Harris Poll.

So if you want to get ahead, you have to take charge.

Regardless of your field or path, the strategies on the following pages can help you level up in your career.



Strategy 1:

Create and maintain a career roadmap

High school and college students are encouraged to plan out career goals and research the required steps to achieve them. But this process is valuable for people at every stage of their work life.

Job candidates are often asked, “Where do you see yourself in five years?” But when was the last time you asked yourself this?

Even if you are steadily employed and have no immediate desire to change roles or employers, be prepared for your career to take sudden turns. As the global shutdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic have shown us, anything can change on a dime:

- Your long-time employer may sell their company to a larger firm, merge with a competitor, or close altogether—perhaps without much warning to the staff.
- Technological advancements could completely alter the way your job duties are executed.
- Your biggest cheerleader on the management team may depart for another job, leaving you feeling untethered or worried about support.
- Economic shifts may affect your company’s staffing levels, sales goals, or individual workload.



Strategy 1:

Create and maintain a career roadmap

In order to be prepared for change—whether you initiate it yourself or it rears its head abruptly—creating and maintaining a personal career roadmap is a valuable tool for navigating the work road ahead.

Devising a career roadmap requires three components:

- Frank self-assessment.
- Establishing short- and long-term goals.
- Creating a specific action plan to achieve them.

Maintaining the roadmap means that, as your circumstances evolve, you take time to revisit and refresh these insights and strategies. Don't wait until you find yourself laid off or at a crisis crossroads before reevaluating your carefully thought-out career plan.



Strategy 1:

Create and maintain a career roadmap

1. Engage in honest self-reflection.

- Where am I career-wise?
- Is it where I want to be, and if so, why not?
- Do I have growth opportunities?
- Am I making the most of my abilities and passions?

2. Think about short-term goals and long-term goals.

Write them down in both broad and specific language:

- I'd like to take on more supervisory duties.
- I want to turn my side hustle into a full-time career.
- I want to become the top salesperson in my favorite department.
- I no longer want a desk job.
- I want to be a franchisee, a business owner, a flex-time worker.
- I'd like to return to school to finish that bachelor's degree program.

Take the time to think about where you are and what you desire and envision for yourself—in one year, two years, or ten years.

- Am I earning to my potential?
- Have I accomplished what I anticipated by this stage?
- Am I generally fulfilled or drained at the end of the day?
- Does my career path suit my personal life?

3. Create a specific action plan to achieve them.

Determine what—specifically—you would need to do to make those goals become a reality. Write it down. Organize the steps chronologically.

Establishing your action plan may require doing some research, having an honest conversation with your spouse or boss, planning to cut your expenses, or figuring out how to blend schooling with working.

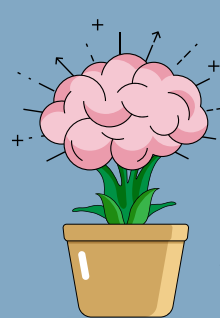


Strategy 1:

Create and maintain a career roadmap

In addition to drawing this master map, maintain your job-hunting tools even while gainfully employed:

- Create and maintain a LinkedIn profile that will accurately represent what you have to offer as a worker and serve as a tool for building a professional network of contacts. That network, developed over time, may become your most valuable asset if a job change becomes advantageous or necessary.
- Keep your resume up to date and in line with current trends. It's far easier to update your experience, positions, and skills as they happen than to have to organize years of data and detail should you need it quickly.
- Connect with a staffing agency recruiter to learn the current expectations and best practices for resumes. What makes an effective resume changes over time.



Strategy 2:

Adopt a growth mindset

“That sounds risky.”

“This is how I’ve always done it.”

“I’m afraid to fail.”

“I’m not really creative.”

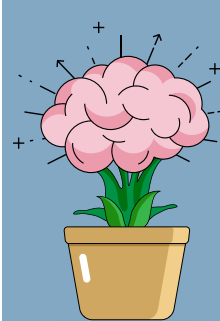
If you’ve said or felt any of these things, you may have a fixed mindset—a way of thinking that stifles your ability to accept challenges, seek opportunity, evolve as a person and worker, and achieve success.

Certainly, there is comfort in familiarity and routine. But not being willing to deviate can lead to stagnation instead of growth. Your career may stall or decline if you aren’t open to new ideas, different perspectives, or more demanding situations.

Remaining open to change, fresh approaches, or unanticipated opportunities is essential for career success and personal satisfaction.

Accepting and even embracing change is good for business. Wise employers value people who seek to grow, as those are the employees that enhance a company’s culture and often improve their bottom line.





Strategy 2:

Adopt a growth mindset

When finding herself unexpectedly lost in an unfamiliar city, Eleanor Lavish, a character in E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, saw an unfettered opportunity.

“One has always to be open, wide open,” she declared.

In life and in work, openness reaps benefits. It creates space for learning, growth, and development. To nurture a growth mindset, fill that space with new experiences and behaviors:

- **Volunteer** for a work assignment that's outside of your comfort zone.
- **Speak up** during a meeting rather than worry you'll say something stupid, or your insights won't add value.
- **Don't react immediately** when a colleague suggests an alternate approach to your usual. Take the time to digest it. Instead of rejecting an idea out of hand simply because it's different, consider it a valid option.
- **Reframe** an intimidating challenge as something you haven't accomplished yet. Just because you've never done something before doesn't mean it's not doable.
- **Bounce back** from failures by focusing on what you can learn from them. Is there a takeaway that will help you do better next time?
- **Don't begrudge others' success.** Aim to be inspired by their achievements.





Strategy 3:

Solicit – and act on – feedback

Part of having a growth mindset instead of a fixed one is recognizing that feedback is essential to learning, and learners evolve and advance.

It is easy to get defensive when you receive constructive criticism or feedback on how you could have done something differently or better. But people who aren't open to the well-considered assessment and advice of others fall victim to many growth pitfalls:

- Assuming your go-to methods are the best way
- Repeating mediocre tactics
- Not seeking new research or data
- Developing bad or lazy habits
- Not incorporating the latest knowledge, tool, or trends into your work
- Working on autopilot

Seeking feedback and allowing it to impact your actions helps you avoid career stagnation and possibly failure. Incorporate thoughtfully considered comments, observations, and criticism of others into how you do things – and you will see your work life blossom.



Strategy 3:

Solicit – and act on – feedback

How can you ensure you are getting the feedback that can help you grow?

Some jobs have formal, built-in feedback mechanisms like annual or quarterly reviews. Whether yours does or not, one practice you can make a habit of is to ask people to give you feedback more regularly:

- After you've finished a task or project, ask your colleagues or direct supervisor for their thoughts on your execution and results. Ask for both positive feedback as well as concerns.
- Resist the urge to immediately deflect constructive criticism or contrary ideas. Absorb the feedback you are given; sit with it a while before reacting.
- Once you've moved past any negative response to being offered critical feedback (like shock, annoyance, or a bruised ego), honestly appraise its potential worth.
- If there's something you learn which could improve your performance or benefit your career, find a way to incorporate it.
- Keep a list of the positive feedback you receive to refer to when you apply for a promotion, ask for a raise or begin looking for your next job.



Strategy 4:

Keep your skills ahead of the competition

Most people want to be competent at what they are currently doing. But what can you gain by exceeding that level? Keeping your skills sharp, up to date, and reflective of market demands will pay off in many ways:

- You become better at your job.
- You use your time more effectively and efficiently.
- You feel more confident and capable.
- Your upskilling efforts could land you a promotion or a raise.
- When you decide to actively job hunt, you are doing so from a place of readiness.

Keep reading for skill-building tips to realize these career benefits.

SKiLLS LOADiNG...





Strategy 4:

Keep your skills ahead of the competition

Be proactive to ensure your skills are keeping pace with what most employers are seeking, even if your current job doesn't require or utilize them:

- Consume the right content. Reading trade journals or professional blogs, following thought leaders on social media, and attending webinars or industry events will keep you informed about what skills are currently in demand and what tools and tactics applicants are expected to know.
- Look for trends in desired expertise. Are there specific skills you see repeatedly listed in job descriptions that you are not confident about? Is there a tool or metric commonly mentioned that you've not yet used in prior jobs? If you identify a required skill you lack which would make you a more compelling candidate, take the time to learn.
- Take a class. A local college, technical school, or school district community education program may offer affordable courses that suit your schedule. Through such classes, you may be able to become familiar with an in-demand software program you never needed before or add more technical and job-specific knowledge to your base skills.
- Check out YouTube. In some cases, a single class or one-night commitment is all it takes to boost your skills and confidence. YouTube videos and other free online expert guidance might be sufficient to sharpen your skills. Even looking up jargon and familiarizing yourself with the lingo of your fields of interest will help you feel confident and sound competent.
- Add a certification. Investigate certifications you can earn that will increase your attractiveness as a candidate or employee and positively impact the salary you can command.
- Choose your next opportunity with skill development in mind. Consider an employer's professional development and training offerings as you evaluate a potential new job. Ideally, your employer should also be invested in your future success and support you with skill-building programs.



Strategy 5:

Surround yourself with the right people

To some people, “networking” sounds gimmicky, forced, and uncomfortable, like schmoozing strangers and passing out business cards at a conference cocktail party. But building a professional network does not have to be formal or awkward.

Use social media to build your network.

Social media has made networking a much simpler process. It’s fairly easy to connect online with friends, family, acquaintances, schoolmates, and coworkers from various phases of your life. Social media algorithms and features like Facebook’s “People You May Know” can help you connect with diverse people and make you aware of connections you never even knew existed. Take advantage of this digital assist for professional support and growth.

Tap the power of following up.

A simple follow-up email or thank-you note can dramatically strengthen your network. Met someone interesting and had a nice chat? Email them later to follow up on how nice it was to meet, remind them of points over which you bonded, share your contact information to keep the door open. Explain what you’re looking for in your career and ask them to connect you to anyone they know who could help.

Remember, networking is not only about connecting with people who are overtly in a position to help you get promoted or land your next job. Think broadly. You never know who might introduce you to someone who could become the difference-maker in your career.



BONUS Strategy

Partner With a Staffing Firm!

If you are ready to take charge of your career but could use a little help, consider partnering with a recruiter.

From the first step, creating a career roadmap, a staffing expert can work with you to assess your current situation—your hard and soft skills, weaknesses and attributes, goals and passions—and help you figure out a clear path forward to where you'd like to be.

Once you have a clear direction set, a staffing firm provides you with access to incredible opportunities, including jobs not advertised publicly. Since successfully pairing a client with a candidate is their end goal, they won't waste your time with positions unless they're a good fit for your career goals.

Your recruiter can also provide valuable feedback on holes in your skill set to fill with additional training or suggest fields you may not have considered but which strongly align with your attributes and goals.

As you prepare for the next step in your career, put a staffing recruiter in your corner – and get ahead faster.

